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ABSTRACT

The contribution of philosophy programs within higher education and to the community is considered. It is suggested that philosophy should play a central part in the college curriculum since the study of philosophy contributes to: the development of students' critical thinking, their ability to deal rationally with normative issues, their understanding of interdisciplinary questions, their grasp of intellectual history and one's culture in relation to other cultures, their capacity to articulate and assess world views, and their skills in writing and speaking. In addition, philosophers can contribute to rational decision-making both on their campuses and in their communities. Because of their breadth, their analytical skills, their interdisciplinary perspective, and their training in dealing with normative questions, philosophers can contribute cogently to resolving public policy issues; and they can offer out-of-school adults a unique approach to important topics. Philosophers can also serve as consultants on a variety of problems. Every discipline raises questions that philosophical investigation can help clarify. Reasons for the value of philosophy graduate programs include: advanced work in philosophy is important to various nonphilosophers, both in the academic world and outside it; and reducing or eliminating a graduate program is likely to weaken undergraduate teaching and it would hinder research that supports undergraduate teaching. (SW)

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THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education in America is currently undergoing reassessment. Colleges and universities are reviewing their programs; students and potential students are increasingly cautious about enrolling for degrees; and the officials who determine the budgets are scrutinizing costs and benefits. This intensive reassessment is due in part to declining student enrollments, rising costs, and, in many institutions, a growing concern by students with the likelihood that their courses will help them to find rewarding employment. These trends have led many people, in and outside the academic world, to wonder what contribution philosophy programs make in higher education and what role they can be expected to play as colleges and universities adjust to the new pressures they face.

In this climate, there are some administrators, students, and faculty who tend to regard philosophy programs as a luxury. The Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association believes that it is vitally important to higher education that this tendency be resisted. Philosophy is not a luxury; it is a basic academic discipline. What follows is intended to explain this position by describing the role of philosophy programs in higher education. This statement is not intended to be exhaustive, and many of its points will apply more to some institutions than to others. But most of the points have important bearing on any institution of higher learning, and some of them

speak directly to current concerns about the preparation of undergraduates both for suitable employment and for responsible participation in American democracy.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

I. The Curriculum

A. Critical Thinking. The study of philosophy helps students to develop both their capacity and their inclination to do critical thinking. Other disciplines also help in this, but philosophy contributes in distinctive ways, and can contribute very extensively, to a student's ability to think critically. Logic is the most general philosophical field which develops this ability. Most universities and many colleges have two or more courses in it; and most other philosophy courses also help students to acquire some of the basic concepts or techniques of logic. In ethics, students are shown how to apply philosophical reflection to moral problems. Courses in ethics usually aim both at giving students a better understanding of moral problems and at helping them develop a reasonable moral outlook from which to approach the moral problems that confront them in their own lives. No other discipline treats these problems in the same comprehensive and systematic ways. Indeed, scientists and others often explicitly hold that such problems are outside their professional domain. The theory of knowledge may be cited as the only discipline which examines standards of evidence and criteria of rational belief systematically and in ways applicable to any subject matter whatsoever. A similar point holds for many other topics that are treated in depth by philosophy and are important for critical thinking; they include definition, knowledge, explanation, causation, justification, communication, meaning, and truth.

B. Normative Issues. Philosophy provides a unique and systematic approach to normative issues, those concerning what ought or ought not to be, what is right or wrong, and so on, as opposed to what is as a matter of fact the case. What are the basic moral rights of persons? What moral obligations do people in a society have to one another? What constitutes justice in the distribution of goods and in the determination of punishment? Such courses as ethics, social-political philosophy, philosophy of law, and aesthetics treat normative questions in depth. These courses usually examine several theories proposed by philosophers in answering these questions, and typically the students are encouraged to formulate and defend their own answers to the questions using the methods and concepts introduced in the courses.

Given the importance which moral, social, aesthetic, and other value questions have in human life, the need for philosophy courses in a balanced curriculum should be evident. It is sometimes thought that these questions do or can receive adequate treatment in the social sciences or perhaps in literature and history. These other disciplines, however, do not, and do not claim to, deal with normative questions in the way philosophers do. Many of the important normative problems philosophers study are not even raised in other disciplines; and those that do arise in other fields rarely receive the sustained critical scrutiny characteristic of philosophical studies.

C. Interdisciplinary Perspective. An important function of philosophy is to foster interdisciplinary perspective. For instance, although scientific explanation is, in one form or another, common to all the sciences, conceptual questions about its nature and comparative questions about its logic in the different sciences belong to the philosophy of science. Some of these questions have been treated by scientists, but rarely with the comprehensiveness and generality required for a synoptic understanding of the topic. Every discipline generates some

essentially philosophical questions about itself, and many questions about relations among different disciplines are also philosophical. Both kinds of questions are examined in such courses as philosophy of science, philosophy of art, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, and philosophy of language.

Philosophy also critically examines methods of inquiry, both in science and in everyday life. Its approach in this is usually conceptual, evaluative, and comparative; and typically the philosophical study of these topics differs from other approaches in the techniques used, in the questions pursued, and in the scope of the theories produced in answering these questions. Both in exploring the interrelations among other disciplines and in examining their methods of inquiry, philosophy fulfills a unique and important role as a meta-discipline. It provides a kind of understanding of the other disciplines, particularly of their presuppositions, standards of evidence, and modes of explanation, which other fields of study neither attempt nor are able to provide.

D. Intellectual History and Cross-Cultural Vision. In its historical and cross-cultural investigations, philosophy provides a sense of our intellectual history and contributes to our understanding of our culture in relation to others. Most departments offer at least ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophy. Many offer courses in Asian philosophies, the philosophy of Judaism, and so on. Courses in these areas help students to locate themselves historically and culturally, to work out a reasonable system of values, and to achieve an understanding of alternatives among values, cultural patterns, and intellectual traditions.

E. Examination of World Views. Most reflective people want to have a coherent view of the world which makes sense of their experience, guides them in certain major decisions, and gives them at least tentative answers to some of the perennial problems concerning human life and its place in the universe.

The study of philosophy helps students to formulate and assess such views, whether they are drawn from the history of Western Thought, from popular interpretations of current science, or from the students' own, often quite unarticulated, reactions to their experience. Among the world views commonly examined in philosophy are materialism, which construes everything there is, including persons, as essentially physical; dualism, which takes minds and hence persons to be radically different from purely physical entities; and of course theism in many of its forms.

Often, socio-political orientations, such as liberal democracy and Marxian socialism, are associated with world views. In examining these positions and world views, the approach of philosophy is holistic, conceptual, and evaluative. Moreover, whatever world view philosophers may hold, in teaching philosophy they normally make it their business to present forcefully arguments for and against their own positions. Their most characteristic concern is to develop students' capacities to make rational decisions on world views and socio-political orientations, not to inculcate any particular one.

F. Writing Skills and Effective Communication. The study of philosophy generally requires analytical writing, critical reading, and practice in formulating intellectual problems and proposed solutions to them. For these reasons, work in philosophy can greatly improve students' writing. To be sure, writing should be taught virtually throughout the curriculum. But philosophy programs can play a major and distinctive part in the task. No other discipline emphasizes, in the same ways, either verbal argumentation or conceptual analysis. Few other disciplines emphasize, to the same degree, students' producing their own theories or critical assessments, as opposed to exposition of existing material. This applies not only to their writing, but to the training in oral presentation of ideas which is given in many discussion courses in philosophy. In addition, clarity,

accurate interpretation, due consideration for others' positions, and the importance of using concrete examples are also stressed in competent teaching of the writing that philosophy requires. These qualities of philosophical training in writing and speaking make well-taught courses in philosophy especially valuable to pre-professional students, as well as to those pursuing a more general education.

Philosophy is not merely the study of doctrines; it is also the study and the practice of methods of inquiry that apply to intellectual problems of any kind whatever. It is partly for this reason that philosophy can aid students quite independently of whether they are deeply interested in, or will long remember, the ideas to which it introduces them. It is also partly for this reason that philosophy can help students whether or not they solve the problems it poses for them or come away impressed more with the complexity of the issues than with any available solutions.

II. Philosophical Research

Many people, including some in the academic world, see philosophy not as a basic research area but simply as a loose speculative enterprise in which one considers a wide range of opinions on abstract issues, and stimulates one's imagination by pursuing interesting but unanswerable questions. This is a stereotype and a caricature. It may be due in part to a tacit assumption that progress entails consensus. But for philosophers, consensus is often suspect. It may arise from unexamined false assumptions, or from shared prejudices, as well as from perceptions of the truth. Moreover, the extent to which philosophers disagree is easy to exaggerate or misconstrue. They often choose to question what others–including their colleagues–assume as unproblematic, and to pursue truth by controversy rather than by mutual reinforcement.

The stereotype of philosophy as loose speculation is belied by the precision and rigor of much contemporary philosophy--and indeed of many philosophical works of the past. It is also falsified by the achievements, in this century, of philosophy as a discipline that examines the structure and presuppositions of most other disciplines, especially the sciences. The stereotype of philosophy as pursuing abstract and unanswerable questions is belied by the progress of philosophy as the only discipline which treats certain of the perennial problems in a systematic, rigorous way that anchors generalizations in concrete examples and brings proposed solutions to bear on everyday human concerns. Among these perennial problems are the relation between mind and body, the nature of justice, the existence of God, and the meaning of freedom. This is not to suggest that other disciplines are irrelevant to these questions; but other disciplines alone cannot adequately treat them. The analysis of the relation between the mental and the physical, for instance, is primarily a philosophical problem, not simply a psychological issue; and the nature of social justice is mainly a philosophical problem, not primarily an issue of political science.

It is also noteworthy that recent philosophical inquiry has produced significant interdisciplinary results. Developments in medical ethics, for example, have influenced medical practice. Similar results appear to be emerging from philosophy of law. A number of philosophers in this field are working together with scholars in jurisprudence, the legal field most closely allied to philosophy. The social sciences, especially psychology, have also been influenced by philosophical research. So have linguistics, literary criticism, historiography, and computer theory.

It should be added that, by comparison with most other research, philosophical research is inexpensive and can be done effectively even in small institutions, given sufficient time for

reflection and an adequate library. It is of course greatly facilitated by a graduate program and all that it implies: exchange of ideas with colleagues committed to research, teaching graduate students, programs of colloquia, and so on. In philosophy, however, a small competent department need not be considered solely a teaching staff, nor should it be solely that if its teaching is to be of the highest quality and reflect the progress of philosophic research.

III. The Importance of Philosophy for Other Disciplines

We have said that philosophy programs can foster an interdisciplinary perspective among students. They can do the same for the faculty, particularly in small institutions or in subunits, such as the colleges of arts and sciences in large institutions. Moreover, philosophers who teach the philosophy of a discipline (for instance, physics, psychology, history, law) are often a useful resource both for their colleagues in that discipline and for its students.

The potential value of a strong philosophy department for other disciplines must not be taken, however, to suggest that philosophy programs can be appropriately absorbed into others, whether humanities departments or broad divisions such as those comprising the social sciences. Philosophy is methodologically distinct, and it pursues a distinct set of questions. An autonomous philosophy program is vital both for these reasons and in order to maximize the contribution which philosophers, unemcumbered by the constraints or special standards of other disciplines, can make to their colleagues and students.

In faculty government, or faculty committees, and in the administrative work of colleges and universities, philosophers often can, by virtue of their special training or their own pro-

fessional knowledge, contribute in unique ways to the quality and success of policy discussions. Philosophers generally try to be sensitive and fair in weighing evidence, to maintain an ability to set out persuasively the reasons for views other than their own, to strive for clear formulations of problems and policies, and to deduce the consequences of a position for situations not anticipated in its formulation. While no discipline has a monopoly on these abilities, we believe that their centrality in the practice of philosophy makes many philosophers uniquely helpful in framing policies and making decisions.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS TO THE COMMUNITY

I. Public Service

Colleges and universities quite properly feel obligations to the communities in which they exist and the populations from which they draw their students. Philosophers can contribute greatly to fulfilling these obligations. In most communities there is much concern with a variety of public policy issues, for instance crime and punishment, welfare, medical care, busing, and nuclear plants. Philosophers are generally competent to speak informatively on certain important aspects of these issues, particularly the normative aspects, which are often the most important. Under state-based programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities, many philosophers have addressed public audiences on such problems. The results have often enhanced public understanding both of the issues under discussion and of the relevance of philosophical reflection to questions of public policy.

II. Continuing Education and Alumni Relations

Both declining enrollments and a related sense of heightened public accountability have brought a new emphasis on "continuing education" courses. These are designed mainly for adults over the typical college age who want enrichment or wish an extension of their post-secondary education. Often, such people want to reflect on normative issues, to discover or return to some of the perennial questions, or simply to try something new. Philosophy has much to offer them. This needs wider recognition by administrators, academic advisors, and sometimes philosophers themselves. In some cases, many of a school's alumni would be interested in programs or short courses in philosophy. Philosophy departments can contribute greatly to satisfying the needs of alumni and many others above the usual college age, whether they seek mainly the intellectual enrichment of philosophy or some of the conceptual and other general skills that study of philosophy can help to develop.

III. Consultation

The idea that philosophers can be useful consultants in "the real world" is rarely entertained outside the profession. The accompanying assumption that philosophical work belongs solely to the ivory tower is another stereotype which must be rejected. A good many philosophers have been consultants to institutions, agencies, businesses, etc. They have also helped to frame policies in the medical, business, and legal fields, as well as with respect to scientific experimentation. In addition, they can frequently give useful testimony at hearings on proposed legislation or on projected public policies; and they can often advise groups of citizens who are trying to accomplish various projects through seeking grants or government

funding. Such activities by philosophers are becoming more common. We believe that the record of their success to date confirms the value of philosophical skills in assessing public policy options and in guiding both the formation of large-scale plans and the solution of non-academic problems.

SERVICE, MAJOR, AND GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN PHILOSOPHY

Most of what has been said bears on the value of any kind of competent philosophy program. There is a danger, however, that different sorts of philosophy programs will be evaluated separately and without an adequate sense of their interrelations. It is especially important to grasp that given a good service program--the philosophy program most widely recognized as indispensable--an undergraduate major program costs little more. For one thing, a good service program should have at least the following four components: logic; history of ancient and history of modern philosophy; several "philosophy of" courses, for instance philosophy of art, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of science; and ethics, including some applied ethics, for example medical ethics, philosophy of law, business ethics, and values and technology. Given this, the addition of several core theoretical courses, such as metaphysics, theory of knowledge, and inductive logic, each taught at least every other year, would meet the minimum requirements for an adequate major.

The value of philosophy graduate programs must be understood differently, particularly given the current job crisis for Ph.D.'s in the humanities. At least three points should be added to what has already been said about philosophy programs: that teaching is not the only activity for which advanced philosophy training can prepare a person; that, in part for reasons

indicated above, advanced work in philosophy is important to various non-philosophers, both in the academic world and outside it; and that completing M.A. programs in philosophy can effectively serve certain people preparing for a non-academic profession, such as law or public service. We must also stress that for most universities, abandoning the graduate program in philosophy would make it impossible to do their undergraduate teaching in philosophy without new faculty appointments or greatly increased class sizes, or both. In philosophy, moreover, the faculty-student ratio is even more important than in many other disciplines. Small discussion groups are essential to a good undergraduate philosophy program, and intensive commenting on students' philosophical writing is the best way, and sometimes the only way, to teach them to do it well.

There is another reason for the value of philosophy graduate programs. In philosophy, the relation between teaching and research is especially close, and reducing or eliminating a graduate program is very likely (in some cases certain) to weaken undergraduate teaching. It would almost certainly hinder research that supports undergraduate teaching. Philosophy is unlike many fields in that the content even of beginning courses is greatly affected by the instructor's research. Controversial issues like the relation between mind and body come into introductions; and what a teacher has to say about them depends heavily on a grasp of sophisticated argumentation which may underlie–indeed, may be necessary for giving–a clear and simple presentation, even though it may never enter the class discussion. Whereas in some fields the difference between a beginning course as taught by a fully competent teaching assistant and the same one taught by an experienced faculty member is largely a matter of their pedagogical skills, differences in knowledge and rigor weigh much more heavily in teaching philosophy. This implies no negative attitude toward any other field; the

point is to emphasize that philosophical research supports and is often necessary for good teaching in philosophy, even at the lower levels.

CONCLUSION

Far from being an academic luxury, philosophy should play a central part in any well balanced college or university curricula. The study of philosophy contributes distinctively and substantially to the development of students' critical thinking. It enhances their ability to deal rationally with normative issues. It extends their understanding of interdisciplinary questions. It strengthens their grasp of our intellectual history and of our culture in relation to others. It increases their capacity to articulate and assess world views. And it improves their skills in writing and speaking.

Philosophers themselves can contribute substantially to rational decision making both on their campuses and in their communities. Because of their breadth, their analytical skills, their interdisciplinary perspective, and their training in dealing with normative questions, they can contribute cogently to resolving public policy issues; and they can offer out-of-school adults, whether in public lectures, in workshops, or in continuing education courses, a unique approach to important topics. Philosophers can also serve as consultants on a variety of problems. Philosophical reflection can be brought to bear on any subject matter whatsoever; every discipline raises questions which philosophical investigation can help clarify; and every domain of human existence confronts us with problems on which philosophical reflection can shed light. The study of philosophy can help students in all the ways this suggests, and the philosophical techniques they assimilate can help them both in their other academic work and in their general problem solving over the years. If higher education in America is to

fulfill its functions, it is essential that the contributions of philosophy as a central branch of learning be more widely understood.